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ABSTRACT

While the literature reveals interpersonal relations important to females, little specific data is available on values of adolescent females. Social comparison research reveals that when objective measures are unavailable to set standards, individuals compare traits and abilities with similar others. This tendency is more pronounced in periods of uncertainty. To determine which values prevail during the uncertain adolescent stage when adolescents strive to individuate, gain emotional independence, and achieve psychosocial identity the Attribute Interest Form was developed and administered to 357 adolescent females from randomly selected classes of grades 9 through 12 in eastern Ohio high schools. For gender comparisons, the same instrument was administered to 343 males. For both sexes findings confirmed predictions of high interest in one another's attributes. As predicted, findings disclosed females as more interested in relationship attributes than males, supporting existing literature. Males were more concerned with possessions and skills. These findings imply that the high energy expended by females in interpersonal relating leaves less available energy for instrumental goal seeking and translates to a disadvantaged position vis a vis males whose interests are closer to "market place" values. More research on identifying the impact of societal and interpersonal influences on females in this critical period is endorsed. (Author)

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TURNING POINT VALUES OF ADOLESCENT FEMALES

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TURNING POINT VALUES OF ADOLESCENT FEMALES

Introduction

Adolescents have the distinction of being neither child nor adult. They are in transition from the latter to the former (Erikson, 1968). What type of person they wish to be and what they want to do in and with life evolves over a period of time and is a product of a number of social and biological processes (Freud, 1958; Blos, 1962; Ausubel, Sullivan & Montemayer, 1977).

Achieving psychosocial identity is the socialization growth task of adolescence (Erikson, 1954, 1960, 1968). In early/middle adolescence - high school - adolescents are in the midst of psychological separation from parents. They strive to individuate, and ultimately achieve emotional independence and maturity. An adolescent society exists with its own mores and customs (Coleman, 1961). It is reflected in various forms in the media, in clothing styles, in language, in music, and in choice of recreation (prosocial and anitsocial behaviors).

Since adolescents are examples par excellence of individuals in a state of transition, uncertainty and frameworklessness (Seltzer, 1982), they look to one another to determine appropriate social values. Research in social comparison revealed that when objective measures are unavailable or inappropriate to set standards, individuals compare traits and abilities with those most similar to themselves (Festinger, 1954). Further research revealed this behavior to be even more

pronounced in a period of uncertainty (Schachter, 1959).

Indeed, the adolescent is uncertain. When he/she takes leave of childhood and enters adolescence, a dramatic incremental expansion of cognitive, physical, emotional, and social abilities begins. Others become increasingly significant. During adolescent psychosocial development there is a keen awareness by each adolescent of the characteristics and attributes of other agemates based in a need to use this information as raw materials to compare with and assess their own attributes and if they are appropriate to their goals. This is a subliminal process carried out in a series of comparative acts.

The information gained is used to finalize decisions on which traits they should acquire or discard (Seltzer, 1982). Notwithstanding outward pictures of casual adolescents, adolescents are very pragmatic when it comes to the serious business of developing a functional persona. Thus, early adolescents crave the company of others in the same stage so as to carry out the comparative act process. If a characteristic appears desireable, the next step is to test whether he/she possesses it or a near variant.

The Attribute Study

We wondered which characterists were most important to adolescents. The Attribute Interest Form was developed. We reasoned that attributes compared with most frequently would reflect those considered most crucial to a sense of identity. *

The Attribute Interest Form, administered to 1,100 adolescents in various locations, tapped how closely adolescents observe one another's characteristics and skills. We hypothesized a great deal of adolescent interest in one another. It was based in the basic premis of the theory of Dynamic Functional Interaction that studying peers is a developmental need which is carried out in a series of deep-structure level comparative acts (Seltzer, 1982).

The 67 attributes selected were a product of pilot-testing of high school adolescents of both sexes in the greater Philadelphia area. The randomly listed attributes covered five categories: physical traits, talent, learned skills, character traits, and family perceptions. Four empty lines were provided to add characteristics not listed on the form.

* This inquiry was part of a number of studies examining the process of adolescent construction of identity and acquisition of the sense of self (Seltzer, 1989).

First, we offer findings from a sample of 338 males and 357 females from public high schools in Canton, Ohio. This student body was 74% white and 24% black; the remainder were of Asian descent. The majority were Christians, primarily Protestant, with a small representation of other major religions. They were from middle and working-class backgrounds. Questionnaires were administered in study halls throughout the day. The subjects were asked whether the listed attributes is noticed in agemates "always," "usually," "sometimes," "hardly ever," or "never." For comparative purposes, Tables 1 and 2 offer findings on both sexes, prior to our turning to reports on females only. The prediction that adolescents would "always" or "usually" notice at least 70% of the 67 attributes was supported.

Table 1

Degree and Frequency of Interest of Adolescent Males and Females in Selected Attributes

Attributes	Degree 1		2		3		4		5	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
	Frequency by %									
Friendliness	18.0	27.5	34.7	36.8	31.5	26.4	9.9	6.2	5.9	3.1
Sense of Humor	19.5	24.2	34.2	32.7	29.3	28.7	12.1	11.0	4.9	3.4
Leadership	18.2	12.6	26.8	19.1	33.3	37.4	14.3	19.7	6.9	11.2
Artistic Talent	15.8	12.2	10.9	17.3	22.5	27.2	22.5	22.9	28.2	20.4
Musical Ability/Singing	7.6	14.6	8.6	12.1	19.0	27.0	23.6	22.0	41.1	24.2
Musical Ability/Instrument	8.6	11.5	8.4	5.1	11.1	12.7	20.4	20.0	51.5	50.7
Athletic Ability	45.3	22.3	26.1	19.5	19.2	35.3	5.4	11.3	3.9	11.6
General School Work Ability	24.6	24.7	38.2	41.3	27.6	24.4	5.2	7.6	4.4	2.0
Enthusiasm	16.0	18.2	33.0	34.7	26.6	32.1	16.5	8.8	7.9	6.3
Creative Writing Ability	11.1	16.7	14.5	18.5	27.1	29.9	26.1	23.7	21.2	11.0
Drama/Acting Ability	5.4	9.0	9.9	11.0	19.7	19.1	24.9	24.7	40.1	36.2
Mechanical Ability	12.3	3.4	17.0	7.7	29.6	12.5	19.5	22.7	21.5	53.7
Cooking	11.3	29.7	15.8	19.8	24.1	28.5	21.7	12.7	27.1	9.3
Typing Skills	5.4	14.1	7.1	18.6	15.3	22.3	27.1	18.6	45.1	26.5
General Physical Appearance	37.8	50.1	28.0	26.8	22.2	14.1	8.6	5.6	2.7	3.4
Clothes	38.7	53.7	27.3	28.4	20.9	13.2	7.6	2.8	5.4	2.0
Figure/Build/Physique	32.5	43.2	25.6	25.6	26.4	17.3	9.9	8.2	5.7	5.7
Complexion	25.7	38.5	22.5	30.0	30.4	20.1	14.1	9.1	7.4	2.3
Popular With Same Sex	16.8	24.9	30.1	38.7	29.1	19.8	15.3	9.6	8.6	7.1
Popular With Opposite Sex	42.7	39.4	29.4	29.6	18.5	20.6	5.7	4.8	3.7	5.6
Ability to Put Into Words What You Feel	20.0	25.1	20.0	28.7	28.1	25.4	22.4	13.2	9.6	7.6

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Attributes	Degree 1		2		3		4		5	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
	Frequency by %									
Ability to Put Into Words What You Think	19.3	23.9	22.2	30.3	30.9	26.7	19.0	13.5	8.6	5.6
Knowledge of Current Events	15.5	12.4	26.1	22.3	32.3	38.9	14.5	17.5	11.6	9.0
Good Listener	3.9	27.7	5.7	33.3	17.0	21.5	29.6	9.0	43.8	8.5
Sexiness	5.4	24.2	6.9	21.4	25.1	29.3	27.3	15.1	35.2	10.0
Sportsmanship		27.0		20.3		28.2		15.2		9.3
Generosity		26.1		31.8		28.1		10.2		3.7
Masculinity	13.4	7.7	16.9	14.2	28.9	16.9	22.9	16.6	17.9	46.4
Femininity	7.7	30.5	18.7	28.2	35.3	24.2	21.4	11.1	16.9	6.0
Wealth (Rich/Poor)	18.0	19.5	35.0	22.6	30.3	33.8	10.6	14.0	6.2	10.0
Cleanliness	29.8	59.4	33.7	16.3	20.4	12.7	9.4	3.9	6.7	7.6
Laziness	8.9	11.2	11.4	14.3	21.8	37.1	24.0	19.9	33.9	17.4
Impatience	32.8	14.9	24.4	16.9	27.2	43.4	10.1	14.6	5.4	10.1
Cattiness		4.6		12.5		35.6		26.1		21.3
Selfishness	12.1	8.8	10.1	13.3	21.1	29.9	21.1	26.0	35.7	22.0
Religiousness	13.4	11.0	13.1	11.9	21.0	29.7	19.4	21.2	33.1	26.3
Snobbiness	14.6	9.4	22.5	8.2	37.0	25.0	15.1	24.1	10.9	33.2
Cheapness	22.9	6.8	30.0	8.2	27.3	23.1	11.1	26.8	8.6	35.2
Type of Family Comes From	21.8	19.2	19.3	17.7	19.1	25.7	14.4	17.4	25.5	20.1
Studiousness	5.7	12.3	16.8	22.5	31.4	35.4	27.7	15.2	18.5	14.6
Cooperativeness	12.3	20.8	12.8	35.0	20.2	29.3	22.5	10.0	32.1	4.8
Self Confidence	8.1	29.1	11.1	31.4	33.7	25.1	25.1	8.3	21.9	6.0

Table 1

Degree and Frequency of Interest of Adolescent Males and Females in Selected Attributes

Attributes	Degree 1		2		3		4		5	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
	Frequency by %									
Prejudice	23.9	9.3	26.1	9.3	30.5	26.1	11.3	21.5	8.1	33.7
Adventurous	16.8	22.0	25.2	20.5	31.4	32.1	15.3	15.6	10.1	9.8
Mother's Occupation	13.8	19.0	20.2	12.0	28.3	16.9	22.0	19.6	14.8	32.5
Father's Occupation	34.1	20.5	29.1	12.2	21.7	17.1	10.6	20.2	5.4	30.0
Morals	35.7	22.3	31.8	22.8	20.2	26.4	7.9	17.5	4.4	11.0
Sensitivity to Other's Feelings	22.2	41.3		24.6	30.4	31.3	15.5	3.2	6.4	5.2
Car Driving	23.6	21.8	29.1	22.6	31.5	22.1	8.6	15.2	7.1	18.3
Stubbornness	35.5	13.1	29.8	19.1	21.7	39.6	8.1	17.4	4.9	10.8
Religion	16.0	11.3	10.9	11.3	24.0	31.0	18.8	21.4	30.4	24.9
Meanness	18.6	11.0	24.8	17.3	30.0	37.1	16.8	21.5	9.9	13.0
Niceness	22.9	28.9	22.9	34.8	27.7	28.0	15.5	4.5	11.0	3.7
Stick-to-it tiveness	30.2	19.9	20.7	25.5	25.7	28.2	14.5	15.1	9.0	11.3
Attitude About One's Family	4.8	21.9	6.9	19.3	9.5	27.8	10.3	18.1	68.4	12.9
Competitiveness	14.9	20.3	24.1	19.1	30.5	34.2	19.1	15.9	11.4	10.4
Maturity	39.6	42.7	22.8	27.2	21.8	18.9	10.6	7.7	5.2	3.4
Creativity	9.9	26.2	22.8	21.9	35.4	31.9	21.3	12.8	10.6	7.1
Honesty	11.4	40.8	18.1	34.6	37.4	19.3	21.5	3.1	11.6	2.3
Loyalty to Friends	7.2	52.6	12.9	29.8	31.7	11.9	30.0	3.4	18.3	2.3
Dancing	7.9	26.6	13.9	15.3	22.7	24.9	27.0	17.8	28.3	15.3
Determination	26.7	32.1	26.0	27.7	26.7	26.9	13.6	9.0	6.9	

Table 1

Degree and Frequency of Interest of Adolescent Males and Females in Selected Attributes

Attributes	Degree									
	1		2		3		4		5	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
	Frequency by %									
Dependability	32.4	44.5	31.2	27.0	25.5	19.8	7.9	5.2	3.0	3.4
Patriotism	12.9	14.4	15.7	19.4	26.6	29.0	23.1	22.3	21.6	15.0
Openness to New Ideas	22.7	23.9	26.7	28.0	27.2	28.8	14.9	13.0	8.6	6.3
Clique-ishness		15.6		16.6		32.2		16.6		19.1

n = 1100

1 = always

2 = usually

3 = sometimes

4 = hardly ever

5 = never

13

14

"Always"

Table 2 offers the 10 top-ranked attributes in the "always" category for a combined analysis of males and females. Primary interest is in appearance and sex appeal. In fact, five characteristics in the top 10 ranks reveal interest in how agemates look and are received by the opposite sex. Outward appearance offers important clues to imaginativeness, individualism, conformity, nonconformity, social class, political philosophy, etc. Furthermore, outward appearance reveals physical maturation. In the time of vulnerabilty and change, it makes sense that adolescents look for **dependability** in agemates. Finding agemates who are dependable not only offers models but tempers psychological uncertainties through demonstration that others who are also uncertain become stable. The data revealed **trustworthiness** to rank high, a corollary finding to dependability. Adolescents live very much in the present and vitally experience the present emotion (fear, disappointment, envy, hurt, anger, love, etc.). Sharing feelings as well as dreams and aspirations that grow out of newly developed capacities entails considerable interpersonal risk. Since adolescents' transitional status robs them of their former supports (parents) they are attracted to others with attributes that help fill this gap. Trustworthiness translates into "I will not forsake you or your confidences."

Hence, **honesty** and **loyalty to friends** are also highly

important qualities. Adolescents' experimentation with their own changing perspectives is often reflected in inconsistency, which can appear to the agemates as dishonesty. While the above attributes are high on the list of both sexes, female interest is stronger (Seltzer, 1989).

TABLE 2. TOP 10 ATTRIBUTES "ALWAYS" OF INTEREST

Attributes	Percent of students	Rank
Cleanliness	59.7	1
Loyalty to friends	49.6	2
Clothes	48.4	3
Dependability	42.7	4
Trustworthiness	42.6	5
General physical appearance	42.5	6
Maturity	40.9	7
Popularity with opposite sex	40.8	8
Figure/build/physique	38.6	9
Honesty	37.7	10

N = 695

Rank 1 went to cleanliness (59.7%) an unexpected finding. Rank 3 was accorded to clothes (48.4%). Whereas interest in clothes could be attributed to conformity needs, concern with both clothes and cleanliness may indicate awareness of a changing body as well as evolving gender roles and sexual attraction.

The remaining characteristics loyalty to friends, honesty, dependability, trustworthiness and maturity ranked in the top 10 are not outwardly observable. The high interest in maturity represents the end goal of adolescent development. Adolescents strive to be "older." When maturity is manifested in a peer, it offers not only comfort, but hope and reassurance.

The Opposite Sex

Data from separate analyses of the males and females in this study provided interesting gender differences and supported hypotheses that 1) females would take more interest in attributes pertinent to relationships, and that 2) males would be more concerned with outwardly observable characteristics. **See Tables 3, 4 and 5.** Males ranked popularity with the opposite sex as surpassed only by athletic ability. Females gave popularity with opposite sex 10th rank. Factors such as gender differences in intensity of sexual feelings and more female interest in attributes of character and friendship may contribute to these findings. Table 3 offers rank ordered findings of top ten for females.

TABLE 3. TOP 10 ATTRIBUTES "ALWAYS" OF INTEREST TO ADOLESCENT FEMALES

Attributes	Percent of students	Rank
Cleanliness	59.4	1
Clothes	53.7	2
Loyalty to friends	52.6	3
General physical appearance	50.1	4
Trustworthiness	46.4	5
Dependability	44.5	6
Figure/build/physique	43.2	7
Maturity	42.7	8
Sensitivity to others' feelings	41.3	9
Popularity with opposite sex	39.4	10

N = 357

Male-Female Preferred Interests

Findings reported Tables 4 and 5 disclose other interesting gender differences. Four hundred and five males from a private Catholic school in Philadelphia were clustered with the mixed gender sample of 695. They were primarily white and from middle class working and professional backgrounds. Other races and socio-economic groups represented were in the minority. The combined samples totaled 1,000 females "always" or "usually" examined more attributes of agemates than did males (Table 4) implying more psychological time and energy are expended by females in comparative acts than by males. Differences could also be attributed to more time spent by males in prolonged comparison on attributes of high interest (e.g. athletic ability). It is also possible that the more advanced physical and socioemotional development of females is manifested in a greater range of interests in agemates (See Table 4).

TABLE 4. PERCENT OF ATTRIBUTES "ALWAYS" AND "USUALLY EXAMINED, BY GENDER

	Always	Usually
Males	27	32
Females	40	35

N = 1,100

We were interested in sex differences in the degree of interest accorded each of the attributes. Table 5 which clusters "always" and "usually" responses displays a comparison of mean differences between the sexes on all 67 attributes. The table also discloses which attributes attracted the sexes displaying high and low interest according to sex. Again the data reveals higher male than female interest in outwardly observable attributes and less male interest in attributes of a socioemotional nature. Although females accorded a good deal of attention to abilities, they are not abilities of a public nature as are those emphasized by males (e.g, athletics and sportsmanship). On the whole, male interests appear to be objective and task-related and are not so much concerned with character. The findings which support more interest by females than males in issues of character may also be related to earlier maturation. They seem to suggest that female adolescents are ready to transfer intimacy and trust from parents and other family members to peers and seek to closely examine the necessary attributes.

TABLE 5. GENDER DIFFERENCES IN "ALWAYS"/"USUALLY" LEVEL OF INTEREST (MEAN PERCENTAGE DIFFERENCES)

Attributes	Gender showing higher interest
Friendliness	F
Sense of humor	ND
Leadership	M
Artistic talent	F+
Music ability (singing)	F
Music ability (instrument)	M*
Athletic ability	M
General school work ability	F*
Enthusiasm	F
Creative writing ability	F
Drama/acting ability	F*
Mechanical ability	M
Cooking	F
Typing	F
General physical appearance	F
Clothes	F
Figure/build/physique	F
Complexion	F
Popularity with same sex	F
Popularity with opposite sex	M*
Ability to put feelings into words	F
Ability to put thoughts into words	F
Knowledge of current events	M
Good listener	F
Sexiness	F
Sportsmanship	M
Generosity	M+
Masculinity	M
Femininity	F
Wealth (rich/poor)	M
Cleanliness	F
Laziness	F+
Impatience	M
Cattiness	F*
Selfishness	F*

TABLE 5. (cont.)

Attributes	Gender showing higher interest
Religiousness	M+
Snobbiness	M
Cheapness	M
Type of family one comes from	M*
Studiousness	F
Cooperativeness	F
Self-confidence	F
Prejudice	M
Adventuresomeness	M
Mother's occupation	M+
Father's occupation	M
Morals	M
Sensitivity to others' feelings	F
Car driving	M
Stubbornness	M
Meanness	M
Niceness	F
Stick-to-it-iveness	M*
Attitude toward one's family	F*
Competitiveness	M
Maturity	F*
Creativity	F
Honesty	F
Loyalty to friends	F
Dancing ability	F
Determination	F
Trustworthiness	F
Dependability	F*
Patriotism	M+
Openness to new ideas	ND
Cliquishness	F

ND = no difference (sexes differed by less than 1%)
\+ = 1 - 2.9% difference
* = 3 - 4.9% difference
N = 1,100

Summary and Discussion

In sum, the findings disclose distinct adolescent interests, some irrespective of sex. Of the top ten attributes "always" noticed, six of the ten were the same. In the cluster of "always/usually" noticed categories five out of the top ten were the same. While physical characteristics are of primary interest to both sexes character traits run a close second. Differences do exist. Male interest is greater in outwardly observable skills and abilities; females are more interested in interactional attributes which affect relationships, such as sensivitity to feelings and loyalty to friends. Both sexes were disinterested in acquired skills such as piano playing or musical ability.

The adolescent world changes daily either because of one's own change or that of others. New understandings and talents often obviate conclusions of yesterday or lead to reacceptance of observations previously discarded. The cycle of change contributes to adolescent stage-related instability, the "no man's land," Kurt Lewin speaks of (1951). It is important to bear in mind that how the adolescent group is perceived to value the particular attributes markedly affects the decision to adopt or reject the attribute since adolescents swiftly and intuitively perceive the manner in which an individual's attributes impress the other group members.

Implications for Females

Turning point values of males and females provide insights into where energies go. These data reveal the high value placed by females on interpersonal relating. These concerns require extensive energy investment thus diminishing available energy resources. This can translate into a disadvantaged position for instrumental goal seeking vis a vis male counterparts whose interests in each other appear closer to "market place" values. The functional outcome of the expenditure of adolescent energies is an unstopped but important arena for future research. Questions like, "do females need an extra store of energy not required for men?" beg more specific research on developing women at a crucial period of their life -adolescence - a turning point in attitude formation, motivation, and determining aspirations and goals.

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TURNING POINT VALUES OF ADOLESCENT FEMALES

Abstract

While the literature reveals interpersonal relations important to females, little specific data is available on values of adolescent females. Social comparison research reveals when objective measures are unavailable to set standards, individuals compare traits and abilities with similar others. This tendency is more pronounced in periods of uncertainty. Tou determine which values prevail during the uncertain adolescent stage when adolescents strive to individuate, gain emotional independence, and achieve psychosocial identity the Attribute Interest Form was developed and administered to 357 adolescent females from randomly selected classes of grades 9-12 in eastern Ohio high schools. For gender comparisons, the same instrument was administrated to 343 males. For both sexes findings confirmed predictions of high interest in one another's attributes. As predicted, findings disclosed females as more interested in relationship attributes, than males supporting existing literature. Males were more concerned with possessions and skills. These findings imply that high energy expended by females in interpersonal relating leaves less available energy for instrumental goal seeking and translates to a disadvantaged position vis a vis males whose interests are closer to "market place" values. More research on identifying impact of societal and interpersonal influences on females in this critical period is endorsed.